

End of Human Knowledge: Absolute Understanding, Pure Imagination, and the Exhaustion of Meaning

Chabane Dahli

Independent Researcher, Algeria

dahlichabane70@gmail.com

February 25, 2026

Abstract

This paper develops an original ontological model of the end of human knowledge grounded in two absolute and opposed cognitive faculties: absolute understanding (*al-fahm*), conceived as a mental force, and absolute imagination/judgment (*al-khayal*), conceived as a mental action. Drawing on a distinction derived from Qur'anic conceptual vocabulary — between *al-mustaqarr* (the Stable: the irreducible real) and *al-mustawda'* (the repository) — the model proposes that while the real content of each cognitive faculty is irreducible and untransferable, the repositories (*al-mustawda'at*) of all philosophical traditions are collectable and unifiable. Four foundational theses are advanced: (1) Temporality belongs to understanding, not to imagination; (2) Every absolute is indivisible in itself, yet its manifestations fragment into discrete meaning quanta (*takmîm*), analogous to quantization in physics; (3) The first human possessed near-absolute understanding with wholly fragmented imagination, while the last human will possess absolute imagination with wholly fragmented understanding and meaning; (4) Understanding is a mental force whereas imagination/judgment is a mental action — a fundamental ontological distinction that departs from Kant's treatment of both as faculties of the same type. Human knowledge necessarily concludes when all understanding has been fragmented into non-integrable meaning quanta and imagination achieves a single complete global form. At that terminus, the question 'why?' loses all ground, for no residual meaning remains to motivate or sustain it.

Keywords: *absolute understanding; absolute imagination; cognitive symmetry; takmîm; al-mustaqarr; al-mustawda'; epistemic finitude; why indicator; mental force; mental action; meaning quanta.*

1. Introduction: The Finite Horizon of Knowledge

The dominant tradition in Western epistemology since the Enlightenment has treated human knowledge as an infinite, progressive enterprise — an open frontier in which each discovery generates new questions without limit. This paper challenges that assumption from an original angle: not by disputing the value of inquiry, but by arguing that the cognitive infrastructure that makes inquiry possible is itself finite and exhaustible.

The argument rests on identifying two absolute but opposed cognitive roots. The first is absolute understanding (al-fahm al-mutlaq): the pure force of logic, meaning, and the question 'why?' The second is absolute imagination/judgment (al-khayal al-mutlaq): the pure action of form, image, and configuration. These two roots are not symmetrical faculties of the same type — as Kant supposed — but ontologically distinct: one is a force (potential), the other is an action (activation). Between them they constitute the entire cognitive horizon of humanity, and their interaction follows a law of inverse completion: as one approaches its absolute, the other fragments.

The model proposed here is grounded partly in a distinction from Qur'anic conceptual vocabulary that has been underexplored in philosophical literature: the contrast between al-mustaqarr (the Stable) and al-mustawda' (the repository). Each philosopher grasps a genuine mustaqarr — an irreducible piece of reality — but remains enclosed within the repository of his own conceptual framework, unable to see it from outside. The present model does not claim to possess a superior mustaqarr; rather, it claims to collect the repositories of the philosophical traditions — to see the house from outside without entering any of its rooms.

2. Conceptual Foundations: Stable and Repository

2.1 The Qur'anic Distinction and Its Philosophical Import

The Qur'anic pair al-mustaqarr / al-mustawda' designates the difference between what is stable and permanent and what is a temporary receptacle. Philosophically, this maps onto a crucial epistemological insight:

Definition 1 — Stable (al-mustaqarr)

A stable is an irreducible core of truth or meaning grasped by a genuine philosopher. It is settled, real, and non-transferable — what remains when all contingent conditions are stripped away. Examples: Kant's transcendental unity of apperception, Aristotle's form-matter distinction, Hegel's dialectical negativity — each is a genuine stable.

Definition 2 — Repository (al-mustawda')

A repository is the conceptual vessel that contains a stable. It is the framework, language, or system through which a philosopher accesses and expresses the stable — but which also limits his perspective. Repositories are collectable from the outside; stables are not transferable.

Every genuine philosopher is enclosed within his mustawda' — which he cannot see from inside, because he sees through it. Repositories are collectable: one can step outside a

given framework and see its shape. One cannot transfer or combine the mustaqarrat themselves, but one can unify the repositories into a single encompassing view.

Theorem 1 – Repository Collection Principle

The epistemic value of the model lies in its ability to unify disparate repositories, thereby revealing the overall structure of philosophical inquiry without replacing the genuine stables they contain.

2.2 Analogy with Unified Field Theory

Physics offers a clarifying parallel. The four fundamental forces — gravity, electromagnetism, the strong and weak nuclear forces — appear distinct at low energies. At extremely high energies (near the Big Bang), they converge into a single unified force. Similarly, each philosophical system operates at a low energy of specialization, while the collection of repositories operates at high energy, seeing the unified structure from which the specializations diverge. This is not a theory of everything — it is a theory of the shape of everything.

3. The Two Absolute Cognitive Roots

3.1 Absolute Understanding: Mental Force

Definition 3 – Absolute Understanding (al-fahm al-mutlaq)

Absolute understanding (U) is the mental force (quwwah 'aqliyyah) constituting the pure potential of logic, meaning, causality, and necessity. It is not acquired knowledge, not a learned system, and not a developed skill. It is the pre-discursive energy from which all coherent thought ultimately derives — the cognitive analogue of potential energy before activation. Its essential attributes include: unity, identity, causality, necessity, potentiality, eternity, perfection, subsistence, simplicity, particularity, and — crucially — temporality.

Why temporality belongs to understanding, not imagination. Time is the order of before and after. It structures causality, succession, and the intelligibility of change. These are logical, not pictorial, operations. A pure image is in itself timeless: a triangle does not contain before and after. Temporality enters the image only when understanding organizes it within a causal or sequential framework.

Understanding as force, not faculty. Kant treats understanding (Verstand) as a faculty — a stable capacity. The present model insists on a stronger claim: understanding is a

force, on analogy with potential energy in physics. It is the source of cognitive activation. It can be exhausted; a faculty cannot.

3.2 Absolute Imagination/Judgment: Mental Action

Definition 4 – Absolute Imagination / Judgment (al-khayal al-mutlaq)

Absolute imagination (I) – equivalent to Kant's faculty of judgment (Urteilskraft) – is the mental action (fi'l 'aqliy): the active process of forming, configuring, and picturing. It is not a power but an activation; not potential but actualization of form. Its corrected attributes (with temporality removed) are: multiplicity, otherness, effectuality, possibility-in-act, imperfection, non-being, composition, and universality.

Theorem 2 – Ontological Distinction

Understanding (U) is a force (potential, energy), while imagination/judgment (I) is an action (activation, shaping). This distinction is fundamental: the first is stable in its core nature, the second is dynamic in its essence. Only if understanding is a force can it be depleted; if it is a mere faculty, no end is possible.

Table 1. The Two Cognitive Roots Compared

Understanding (al-fahm)	Imagination / Judgment (al-khayal)
Mental force (quwwah 'aqliyyah)	Mental action (fi'l 'aqliy)
Potential	Activation
Stable, unified	Dynamic, forming
Source of meaning and causality	Source of form and image
Temporality (order of before/after)	Timeless in itself
Finite – exhaustible	Completable

3.3 The Purity Condition

Proposition 1 – Purity Condition

Absolute understanding manifests only when imagination is fragmented and discontinuous. Absolute imagination manifests only when understanding is fragmented

and dispersed. Neither absolute root exists in a pure, isolated state in actual human cognition – each requires the fragmentation of the other in order to manifest.

The poet possesses genuine linguistic form but his meaning is probable and diffuse, not logically necessary. The philosopher possesses genuine logical meaning but requires a multiplicity of imprecise, general terms to express it. Neither possesses both simultaneously.

4. The Law of Cognitive Symmetry

Definition 5 – Law of Cognitive Symmetry

When one absolute cognitive root approaches maximal realization, the other must fragment to provide the material for cognition. Formally: $\|U\| \uparrow \implies I \text{ fragments};$
 $\|I\| \uparrow \implies U \text{ fragments}$ *where $\|\cdot\|$ denotes degree of completion.*

Theorem 3 – Inverse Completion

If $U \rightarrow U_{abs}$, then $I \rightarrow I_{frag}$. Conversely, if $I \rightarrow I_{abs}$, then $U \rightarrow U_{frag}$.

Corollary 1 – Mutual Exclusion

The two absolute roots cannot both be maximally realized simultaneously in human cognition.

Corollary 2 – Directional History

Since imagination grows cumulatively across history while understanding fragments, human cognitive history has a direction: from understanding-dominance toward imagination-dominance.

5. Fragmentation and Meaning Quanta (Takmîm)

5.1 The Concept of Takmîm

The term takmîm is derived from al-kamm (quantity, quantum) – a deliberate analogy to quantization in physics. It designates the process by which an indivisible absolute manifests in human cognition through fragmentation into discrete, minimal units.

Definition 6 – Takmîm

Takmîm is the conversion of an absolute cognitive root into discrete quantized units – meaning quanta (μk) for understanding, image quanta (ιm) for imagination – that can be individually manipulated, communicated, and exhausted. The absolute itself is indivisible; what fragments are its manifestations in human discourse: specific logical frameworks, particular theories, individual disciplines.

Theorem 4 – Exhaustion Principle

As $t \rightarrow \infty$, the number of meaning quanta Q_u grows while the coherence of understanding C_u decreases: $\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} Q_u / C_u = \infty$

5.2 The Physics Analogy

- Absolute understanding ↔ quantum vacuum: pure potential energy, source of all possible excitations.
- Meaning quanta ↔ virtual particles: discrete manifestations that emerge from the vacuum and return to it.
- Takmîm ↔ particle creation: conversion of potential into discrete, observable units.
- Exhaustion of understanding ↔ vacuum exhaustion: when all potential is converted into particles, no new excitations are possible.

5.3 Cognitive Entropy

The degree of fragmentation of understanding can be expressed through a cognitive entropy measure:

$$H(U) = - \sum p_k \cdot \log(p_k)$$

where p_k is the relative weight of the k -th meaning quantum in active cognitive use. As $H \rightarrow H_{\text{max}}$, understanding approaches maximal fragmentation: all meaning is distributed across disconnected quanta, and no unified logical force remains.

6. The Historical Trajectory: From First to Last Humanity

6.1 Phase One: The First Human (Understanding-Dominant)

The first human — not primitive in the pejorative sense, but cognitively original — inhabited the understanding-dominant phase. Understanding was near-absolute: unified, unfragmented, close to the absolute root. The question 'why?' was not a philosophical project but an immediate, pre-discursive orientation toward meaning. Imagination was wholly fragmented: no stable symbolic systems, no continuous representational structures. There were no real images requiring real imagination; there was only real understanding requiring no image at all.

6.2 Phase Two: The Middle — Accumulation and Fragmentation

The middle of human history is characterized by a dual process. Imagination accumulates: myths, religions, philosophies, sciences, technologies, and simulations all develop. The world-picture grows more coherent, more detailed, more unified. Understanding fragments: the original unified meaning breaks into specialized disciplines, technical vocabularies, local logics. Each fragment is a genuine meaning quantum — real but partial, unable to generate unified meaning alone. Formally:

$$I(t+1) = I(t) + \alpha \cdot (1 - I(t)) \quad [\textit{imagination growth}]$$

$$U(t+1) = U(t) \cdot (1 - \beta) \quad [\textit{understanding fragmentation}]$$

where $\alpha, \beta > 0$.

6.3 Phase Three: The Last Human (Imagination-Dominant)

The last human is the mirror-image of the first. Imagination is absolute: a single complete global image of reality — perhaps a unified simulation, a total model, a complete scientific theory of everything in its formal sense. Understanding is wholly fragmented: only scattered meaning quanta remain, each real in itself but incapable of generating new unified meaning. The mustaqarrat are all spent; only empty repositories remain.

The question 'why?' disappears — not because it is answered, but because there is no longer any cognitive force capable of asking it meaningfully. There will be no real meaning requiring understanding, just as in the beginning there was no real image requiring imagination.

6.4 The Why-Indicator

Definition 7 — Why Indicator

The Why Indicator (W) is a measure of the presence of genuine 'why' questions in a culture or epoch, reflecting the residual stock of absolute understanding.

Theorem 5 – Termination Criterion

When the Why Indicator reaches zero, human knowledge has ended: $W = \int_0^T w(t) dt = 0$
where $w(t)$ is the rate of new, fundamental 'why' questions being genuinely asked.

Proposition 2 – The Why-Indicator as Diagnostic. As long as the question 'why?' is genuinely asked and genuinely felt to require an answer, there remains unconsumed logical force – residual absolute understanding. The disappearance of 'why?' as a meaningful question marks the exhaustion of that force. In the beginning, 'why?' was total, immediate, pre-discursive. In the middle, it is productive but increasingly specialized. At the end, it becomes meaningless – not answered, but groundless.

7. The Water–Air Analogy

Consider a closed system containing one liter of liquid water (representing unified understanding) and one liter of air as bubbles dispersed within it (representing fragmented imagination). The initial state presents coherent water and dispersed bubbles. Over time the bubbles coalesce and the water evaporates. The final state is a unified gas phase and dispersed water vapor. The total quantity is conserved; only the distribution changes. So too with the cognitive system: no meaning is destroyed – it is only fragmented and dispersed until no coherent force remains.

Table 2. The Water–Air Analogy

Physical System	Cognitive System	Stage
Liquid water (dense, coherent)	Understanding (unified, absolute)	Beginning
Air as bubbles (fragmented)	Imagination (fragmented)	Beginning
Bubbles coalesce into unified gas	Imagination accumulates into global form	Middle
Water evaporates into dispersed vapor	Understanding fragments into quanta	Middle
Unified gas (one coherent phase)	Absolute imagination (complete form)	End
Dispersed water vapor	Fragmented understanding (meaning	End

	quanta)	
--	---------	--

8. Departure from Kant: A Formal Comparison

8.1 Kant's Architecture

Kant's critical philosophy identifies three primary faculties: (1) Sensibility (Sinnlichkeit): the receptive faculty of intuition (space, time); (2) Understanding (Verstand): the spontaneous faculty of concepts and categories; (3) Judgment (Urteilkraft): the mediating faculty between sensibility and understanding. For Kant, temporality is a form of inner intuition – belonging to sensibility, not to understanding.

8.2 Key Departures

Table 3. Kant vs. Dahli – Fundamental Distinctions

Aspect	Kant	Present Model
Nature of Understanding	Faculty – stable, inexhaustible capacity	Force – finite, exhaustible potential
Nature of Judgment / Imagination	Faculty – stable, inexhaustible capacity	Action – dynamic activation, completable
Temporality	Form of inner intuition (sensibility)	Attribute of understanding (logical order of before / after)
End of Knowledge	Not addressed; knowledge is progressive and infinite	Necessary terminus when understanding is fully fragmented
Repositories	Stable transcendental structures	Temporary vessels – collectable and transcendable

The difference between faculty and force is not a matter of vocabulary. A faculty is a stable, recurring capacity – it does not diminish through use. A force is a finite potential that can be exhausted. The entire argument for the end of knowledge depends on this distinction: only if understanding is a force can it be depleted; if it is a mere faculty, it is inexhaustible by definition, and no end is possible. Similarly, an action can reach completion when all possible forms are actualized; a faculty cannot.

9. Implications

9.1 For the History of Philosophy

Every philosophical tradition has grasped a genuine *mustaqarr* while remaining enclosed within its *mustawda'*. Progress in philosophy is not the accumulation of better *mustaqarrat* but the proliferation of more refined *mustawda'at* — more sophisticated repositories, each real but partial. The philosopher who collects the vessels does not compete with the philosophers inside them; he occupies a different function.

9.2 For Epistemology

- Knowledge is finite: bounded by the initial stock of absolute understanding.
- Specialization is depletion: the fragmentation of meaning into disciplines is the spending of the original logical force, not its multiplication.
- The 'why?' question is an instrument: its vitality measures the remaining stock of understanding; its disappearance announces the terminus.

9.3 For the Philosophy of Mind

- The poet and the philosopher represent complementary poles: genuine form with probable meaning versus genuine meaning with imprecise form.
- Artificial intelligence, insofar as it excels at image-processing and form-generation, belongs to the imagination-dominant phase — not because it lacks intelligence, but because it lacks the force of understanding.
- The diminishing rate of fundamental discovery in mature sciences may reflect the fragmentation of meaning rather than the exhaustion of phenomena.

10. Conclusion: The End of Human Knowledge

The model presented in this paper can be summarized in five theses:

1. There are two absolute cognitive roots: understanding (mental force, source of meaning and temporality) and imagination/judgment (mental action, source of form and image).
2. These roots interact according to the Law of Cognitive Symmetry: the completion of one requires the fragmentation of the other.
3. Human cognitive history describes a symmetric inversion: from near-absolute understanding with fragmented imagination (the first human) to absolute imagination with fully fragmented understanding (the last human).
4. The process of *takmîm* (fragmentation into meaning quanta) is irreversible: once absolute understanding has been spent into quanta, it cannot be reconstituted.

5. The end of human knowledge is the moment when no residual understanding remains to ground the question 'why?' – when all meaning has dispersed into quanta and imagination has achieved its single, complete global form.

This is not a counsel of despair. The end of knowledge is the logical completion of a process that began with the first human's immediate orientation toward meaning. The repositories of all philosophical traditions are gathered; the mustaqarrat are spent; the house is complete. What remains is pure form – beautiful, coherent, and silent.

References

- [1] Dahli, C. (2026). Beyond the Mind: Absolute Cognitive Roots and the Conflict of Opposites Between Understanding and Imagination. Independent publication.
- [2] Kant, I. (1781/1787). Critique of Pure Reason (N. Kemp Smith, Trans.). Macmillan, 1929.
- [3] Kant, I. (1790). Critique of Judgment (W. Pluhar, Trans.). Hackett, 1987.
- [4] Aristotle. Metaphysics (W. D. Ross, Trans.). Oxford University Press.
- [5] Ibn Khaldun. (14th c.). Muqaddimah (F. Rosenthal, Trans.). Princeton University Press, 1967.
- [6] Bergson, H. (1907). Creative Evolution (A. Mitchell, Trans.). Henry Holt, 1911.
- [7] Wittgenstein, L. (1922). Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. Kegan Paul.
- [8] Feynman, R. P. (1965). The Character of Physical Law. MIT Press.
- [9] Nagel, T. (1986). The View from Nowhere. Oxford University Press.
- [10] Heidegger, M. (1927). Being and Time. Harper & Row.
- [11] The Qur'an. Concept of al-mustaqarr / al-mustawda' drawn from classical exegesis (tafsir) of Surah Al-An'am 6:98.